Organization (WTO) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on agriculture and textile sector.

(b) to (d) Under the exceptional provisions of Article XVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 India has some residual quantitative restrictions on imports maintained for balance of payment purposes. Article XVIII:B provides for the progressive elinination for these restrictions as the balance of payments conditions improve. Accordingly India has agreed to a 6-Year time schedule starting 1 April, 1997 for the removal of all the residual imports restrictions maintained on agricultural, textile and industrial products for balance of payment purposes. The removal of restrictions will be effected in three consecutive phases of three years, two years and one year and a balanced manner within each phase. The time schedules in respect of individual products have been determined in consultation with administrative Ministers.

Irregularities in import of Wheat from Australia

473. SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have unilaterally decided to import wheat from Australia in January, February this year;

(b) if so, the details of the import and the compulsion behind importing wheat;

(c) whether irregularities have been noticed in the import of wheat much to the vested interest of selected people in the Ministry;

(d) if so, whether any investigations have been carried out; and

(e) what is the outcome of the investigations?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) and (b) Government constantly review the stock position of foodgrains in the Central Pool *vis-a-vis* the prescribed minimum buffer norms, the production of foodgrains in the country, trend of procurement, requirement for the Public Distribution System/other Welfare schemes, open market prices etc. and decision to import foodgrains is taken depending on the overall situation. Due to untimely rains during the sowing season, the Ministry of Agriculture had initially estimated that the production of wheat during the current Rabi season was likely to be 64.5 million tonnes as against the production of 69.27 million tonnes last year. Government therefore, decided to import upto 2.00 million tonnes of wheat during 1998-99 to build up adequate reserves for keeping prices under control. Against this STC has finalised contract for import of 1.5 million tonnes of wheat from Australia @US $ 142.50 PMT POB.

(c) No, Sir.

(d) and (e) Does not arise.

Export of Silk, Jewellery and Automobiles

474. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) the details of steps taken by Government during the preceding three years to boost India's export of silk, Jewellery and automobiles; and

(b) the details of steps Government propose to take in thiss regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE): (a) A number of steps have been taken by the Government to boost export of silk, Jewellery and automobiles. Specific measures for the jewellery sector include liberalisation of gold import policy, increasing the number of nominated agencies permitted to stock and sell gold, setting up of private/public bonded warehouses in EPZ/DTA, permitting EOC/EPZ units to sell 10% of their output in DTA on payment of duty etc, For the silk sector Zero duty EPCG Scheme has been extended to include Sericulture sector, and under DEPB Schemes a rate of 12% has been notified for Silk sector. The thrust is on direct promotional activities, such as participation in international fairs. For the automobiles sector guidelines have been laid down for signing of MOU for imports of CKD/SKD kits/components.

(b) Export promotion is a continuous process and all necessary steps will be taken to ensure a highgrowth of exports in all sectors.